

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: E.

Date: July 25, 2007

Topic: Final Review of a Request for Increased Graduation Requirements from Westmoreland County Public Schools

Presenters: Ms. Anne Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications

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Origin:

☐ Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

☒ Board review required by

☐ State or federal law or regulation

☒ Board of Education regulation

☐ Other: _____

☒ Action requested at this meeting ☐ Action requested at future meeting: _____

Previous Review/Action:

☐ No previous board review/action

☒ Previous review/action

date First review - June 28, 2007

Background Information:

The Standards of Quality (SOQ), in § 22.1-253.13:4 of the *Code of Virginia*, require local school boards to "...award diplomas to all secondary school students, including students who transfer from nonpublic schools or from home instruction, who earn the units of credit prescribed by the Board of Education, pass the prescribed tests, and meet such other requirements as may be prescribed by the local school board and approved by the Board of Education."

Standard 8 VAC 20-131-50 of the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* (Standards of Accreditation) addresses graduation requirements. The regulation says, in part: "The requirements for a student to earn a diploma and graduate from a Virginia high school shall be those in effect when that student enters the ninth grade for the first time. Students shall be awarded a diploma upon graduation from a Virginia high school.... The following requirements shall be the only requirements for a diploma, unless a local school board has prescribed additional requirements that have been approved by the Board of Education. All additional requirements prescribed by local school boards that have been approved by the Board of Education, remain in effect until such time as the local school board submits a request to amend or discontinue them...."

The Board's *Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards of Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, adopted by the Board on October 26, 2006, gives school divisions guidance in prescribing additional credit requirements for the Standard and Advanced Studies diplomas. The guidance document says, in part:

Standard Diploma: Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions to require up to two additional local credits to obtain the Standard Diploma, up to a maximum of 24 required credits. Generally, the Board will approve local requests for additional graduation credit requirements in the core discipline areas of the Standards of Learning (English, mathematics, science or history/social science).... Requests for additional local credits in disciplines outside the core discipline areas will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Advanced Studies Diploma: Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions for local additional credits required for the Advanced Studies Diploma above the 24 contained in the standards if the credits are in the discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, history/social studies, fine arts (including performing arts), career and technical education, or foreign language. The Board will consider credits outside these disciplines on a case-by-case basis.

Transfer Students: Any local school division receiving approval to increase its course credit requirements may not deny either the Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma to any transfer student who has otherwise met the requirements contained in the standards, if the transfer student can only meet the division's requirements by taking a heavier than normal course load in any semester, by taking summer school, or by taking courses after the time when he or she otherwise would have graduated.

Prospective Application / Advance Notice: A local school division's additional credit requirements should apply only to students who have not yet entered ninth grade at the time the additional credits are approved.

Allocation of Electives: Generally the Board will approve requests from local school divisions to allocate elective credits for local prescribed course requirements, while reducing the number of electives by an equal amount so that the total number of graduation credit requirements remains unchanged....

Summary of Major Elements:

Westmoreland County Public Schools is requesting approval to require students to complete six additional courses to earn a Standard or an Advanced Studies Diploma. Students would be required to complete one course in personal finance, two courses in career and technical education, and three additional electives. This would increase the number of prescribed credits by three and the number of electives from six to nine for the Standard Diploma, and from two to five for the Advanced Studies Diploma.

Westmoreland County is requesting the increased graduation requirements to become effective for students entering the ninth grade for the first time in the 2007-2008 school year. A semester block schedule will be implemented in the fall of 2008-2009, providing new opportunities for students to earn standard credits.

The Board of Education's guidelines limit the Standard Diploma to 24 standard credits. Approval of this request would increase the Standard Diploma requirements for Westmoreland County Public Schools to 28 credits. The Board's guidelines also require advanced notice to ninth graders who will be affected by the change.

Superintendent's Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board approve the request from Westmoreland County Public Schools to increase graduation requirements, effective beginning with the ninth grade class of 2008-2009, to ensure that all students have ample time to plan for the increased graduation requirements and ample opportunity to earn the additional credits.

Impact on Resources: There is no impact on resources at the Department of Education.

Timetable for Further Review/Action: Upon approval of the request, Department of Education staff will notify Westmoreland County Public Schools of the Board's action.

Standard Diploma

	Verified Credit Requirements	Standard Credit Current Requirements	Standard Credit Proposed Requirements
English	2	4	4
Mathematics ¹	1	3	3
Laboratory Science ^{2, 6}	1	3	3
History and Social Sciences ^{3, 6}	1	3	3
Health and Physical Education		2	2
Fine Arts or Career and Technical Education		1	1
Personal Finance			1
Career and Technical Education			2
Electives⁴		6	9
Student Selected Test ⁵	1		
Total	6	22	28

1. Courses completed to satisfy this requirement shall be at or above the level of algebra and shall include at least two course selections from among: Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, or other mathematics courses above the level of algebra and geometry. The Board may approve additional courses to satisfy this requirement.

2. Courses completed to satisfy this requirement shall include course selections from at least two different science disciplines: earth sciences, biology, chemistry, or physics. The Board may approve additional courses to satisfy this requirement.

3. Courses completed to satisfy this requirement shall include U.S. and Virginia History, U.S. and Virginia Government, and one course in either world history or geography or both. The Board may approve additional courses to satisfy this requirement.

4. Courses to satisfy this requirement shall include at least two sequential electives as required by the Standards of Quality.

5. A student may utilize additional tests for earning verified credit in computer science, technology, career and technical education or other areas as prescribed by the Board in 8 VAC 20-131-110.

6. Students who complete a career and technical education program sequence and pass an examination or occupational competency assessment in a career and technical education field that confers certification or an occupational competency credential from a recognized industry, or trade or professional association or acquires a professional license in a career and technical education field from the Commonwealth of Virginia may substitute the certification, competency credential, or license for (i) the student selected verified credit and (ii) either a science or history and social science verified credit when the certification, license, or credential confers more than one verified credit. The examination or occupational competency assessment must be approved by the Board of Education as an additional test to verify student achievement.

Advanced Studies Diploma

	Verified Credit Requirements	Standard Credit Current Requirements	Standard Credit Proposed Requirements
English	2	4	4
Mathematics ¹	2	4	4
Laboratory Science ²	2	4	4
History and Social Sciences ³	2	4	4
Foreign Language ⁴		3	3
Health and Physical Education		2	2
Fine Arts or CTE		1	1
Personal Finance			1
Career and Technical Education			2
Electives		2	5
Student Selected ⁵	1		
Total	9	24	30

1. Courses completed to satisfy this requirement shall be at or above the level of algebra and shall include at least three different course selections from among: Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, or other mathematics courses above the level of Algebra II. The Board may approve additional courses to satisfy this requirement.

2. Courses completed to satisfy this requirement shall include course selections from at least three different science disciplines from among: earth sciences, biology, chemistry, or physics or completion of the sequence of science courses required for the International Baccalaureate Diploma. The Board may approve additional courses to satisfy this requirement.

3. Courses completed to satisfy this requirement shall include U.S. and Virginia History, U.S. and Virginia Government, and two courses in either world history or geography or both. The Board may approve additional courses to satisfy this requirement.

4. Courses completed to satisfy this requirement shall include three years of one language or two years of two languages.

5. A student may utilize additional tests for earning verified credit in computer science, technology, career or technical education or other areas as prescribed by the board in 8 VAC 20-131-110.